

Commission for Rural Communities News Release

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South East helps summit shine spotlight on rural business success

Business leaders, local authorities and community organisations from across the South East have been discussing how inspiration and leadership can help release the potential of rural economies at a special summit.

The event, to showcase success stories and agree action to help promote the achievements, strengths and contribution of rural economies, was organised by the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC), South East of England Development Agency and East of England Development Agency.

Speakers included Dan Norris MP, the newly-appointed Minister for Rural Affairs and Environment and Dr Stuart Burgess, Chairman of the CRC and the Government's Rural Advocate.

Dr. Burgess said: "This summit was all about how we can work together to raise the profile and aspirations of rural businesses and residents. We are delighted to welcome speakers from the public and private sectors to share their experiences.

"Giving rural communities a voice, and ensuring that it is not only heard by decision-makers but also reflected in policy development and delivery, is a key part of this. We will be hearing how the public sector can lead the way in championing rural people, places and businesses and debating ways to take action to meet their needs.

"We were also very pleased that a number of rural businesses joined us to help inspire other firms, entrepreneurs and young people who want to stay in rural areas either to gain qualifications or build a career. They demonstrated the potential and diversity of rural economies which are not marginal, small or traditional but often vibrant, enterprising and successful.

“Above all we hope that delegates left with a better understanding of the needs and abilities of rural businesses and a commitment to champion their achievements, potential and important contribution to the national economy and wider society. By bringing together people from a wide range of rural, business, public sector and community organisations, we are confident that this summit will help to secure better recognition of and support for rural economies in the future.”

Rural Affairs Minister, Dan Norris MP added: “Lots of rural businesses have real success stories to tell. They are innovative and committed, and contribute hugely to the national economy.

“The government will continue to support rural businesses and communities through the economic recession, and will ensure that they are able to benefit fully from the help we are making available to them.”

Alex Pratt, Board Member, South East England Development Agency, said: "In the end, it is our wealth creators who pay for all that we hold dear. In rural settings they often also act as powerful catalysts for change in their communities, which is why it is essential to help rural entrepreneurs where we can and to encourage these businesses to realise their potential."

The summit, held in Aylesbury on 30 June, was attended by business leaders, local authorities, community organisations and economic development agencies from around the country. It was the second in a series of events following Dr Burgess’s report last year to the Prime Minister which focused on releasing the potential of England’s rural economies. His recommendations included taking steps to raise the profile of rural economies, for example through rural champions, and encouraging the creation of strong sharing networks to support improvement and efficiency for rural and sub-regional authorities on local economic development.

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Notes to editors

1 Further details of the summit 'Releasing the Potential of Rural Economies: Inspiration and Leadership' held on 30 June, can be found at:
www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/events/releasingthepotentialofruraleconomiesinspirationandleadership

2 The report, 'England's rural areas: steps to release their economic potential', by the Rural Advocate to the Prime Minister was submitted last summer and can be found at: www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/files/crc67_englands_rural_areas1.pdf

The Rt. Hon Hilary Benn MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs set out the Government's response to the report at the first summit on innovation held earlier this year in York. 'Resilience and Opportunity: The Government's response to the report of the Rural Advocate England's rural areas: steps to release their economic potential', February 2009 can be found at:
www.defra.gov.uk

3 The CRC was established in April 2005 and became an independent body on 1 October 2006 following the enactment of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. The role of the CRC is to provide well-informed, independent advice to government and ensure that policies reflect the real needs and circumstances of people living and working in rural England. We give particular focus to tackling disadvantage and economic underperformance.

We have three key functions:

- Advocate: the voice for rural people, business and communities;
- Expert adviser: providing evidence-based, objective advice to government and others; and
- Independent watchdog: monitoring and reporting on the delivery of policies nationally, regionally and locally.

Further information about the CRC and its work can be found at:
www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk